

# Mongolian Voices of Discontent in Lifanyuan Records of the early Qing-period

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## 1 Introduction

Over the recent decades, an enormous amount of Manchu and Mongolian language archival material from the Qing period (1636–1911) has been published in China and in Mongolia. This ushered in a new era of research on the so-called outer regions of the Qing Empire. However, as other archival collections in the world, Qing archives can only preserve fragments and the historian will find that some voices have been silenced.<sup>1</sup> According to Beatrice Bartlett, the Manchu court used archives as an instrument of its power. In order to portray the government as all-powerful and effective, anything which did not fit in with this picture was omitted and, “for the Qing archivists, protecting the imperial face was the all-important goal”<sup>2</sup> In order to ensure that nothing damaging would be on file in the archives, documents were not only destroyed, but sometimes files were classified in the wrong order and events retold in a different context.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, evidence of disrespect for imperial authority or expression of local autonomy was – in most cases – eclipsed.

When archival material was later used for the compilation of official court histories, it was again subjected to a process of selection and adjustment. All infor-

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<sup>1</sup> Ladwig, Roque, Tappe, Kohl, Bastos, “Fieldwork between Folders”, pp. 20/21.

<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, “Qing Statesmen, Archivists, and Historians and the Question of Memory”, p. 423.

<sup>3</sup> Weiers, “Die Historische Dimension des Jade-Siegels”, pp. 121–124 and p. 135.

mation which was not particularly flattering for the court was filtered out. Accordingly, the Huang Qing Kaiguo Fanglüe, a compilation commissioned in 1786 to glorify the history of the Manchu royal house before 1644, leaves no doubt that by the mid-seventeenth century the Mongols living south of the Gobi were firmly integrated into the Qing Empire. We are informed that in May 1636 forty-nine representatives of sixteen Mongolian polities urged the Manchu ruler to adopt an honorary title and on the occasion of the proclamation of the Qing dynasty vowed allegiance to the emperor.<sup>4</sup> The court's authorized tale of Mongol authorities joyfully accepting Qing overlordship was circulated most freely, and still has an impact on our understanding of the momentous decision of the Mongolian nobility to accommodate with Qing rule. For this reason, it is interesting to occasionally find archival evidence that Mongolian authorities at the time were not as submissive to imperial rule as official history tries to make us believe.

## 2 Codes of Conduct and Non-violent Protest

In 1659, a memorial was made by the Lifanyuan informing the emperor that two prominent rulers of the Qorčın Mongols had bluntly rejected the imperial invitation to come to the capital. The Qorčın leaders did not even attempt to make their declining answers sound submissive. Lifanyuan officials were deeply concerned by what they considered as disrespectfulness and summarized the provocative remarks of the Qorčın leaders with these words:<sup>5</sup>

“When you, the emperor, said ‘I want to get along well with you like a close relative, come!’ the Joriktu Cin Wang<sup>6</sup> and the Darhan Baturu Giyūn Wang<sup>7</sup> of the Qorčın did not happily come. Instead, the Joriktu Cin Wang did not ask for an imperial order, but, on his initiative, said ‘Because of the illness of the imperial princess I will postpone my arrival.’ The Darhan Baturu Giyūn Wang brought forward all sorts of things like ‘I caught a cold’ and ‘Moreover, my wife has a

<sup>4</sup> Hauer, Huang-Ts'ing K'ai-kuo Fang-lüeh. Die Gründung des Mandschurischen Kaiserreiches, pp. 395/396.

<sup>5</sup> Manchu language memorial preserved in the Collection of Manchu-Mongolian routine memorials from the Lifanyuan, dated Shunzhi 16/intercalary3/24 (May 14th, 1659). in Qing chao qianqi Lifanyuan (2010: vol. 1, 217): (top 8) horcin i joriktu cin wang . (9) darhan baturu giyūn wang . (10) ++ dergici cohome niyamarama acaki jio sehede . uthai urgunjehei jiderakū (11) elemangga joriktu cin wang oci . (12) ++ hese be bairakū . ini cisui gungju nimere be dahame jidere be tookaha (bottom 1) shebi : darhan baturu giyūn wang geli beye edun dekdehebi : gege geli (2) hefeli aššahabi : juwe omolo akū oho seme hacilame baita (3) tucibume . (4) ++ hese be jurceme wesimbuhengge ambula giyan de acahakūbi : This passage is also discussed in my paper “From Personal Network to Institution Building”.

<sup>6</sup> Died in 1666 and was succeeded by his younger brother Biltagar (Qing chao qianqi Lifanyuan 2010: vol. 1, p. 401/402).

<sup>7</sup> Title of Manjusiri (died 1665), who ruled the middle banner of the Qorčın of the left wing. For this person see Čing ulus-un üy-e-yin mongyol qosiyu čiyulyan, pp. 31/32. Jagchid, “Mongolian-Manchu Inter-marriage in the Ch'ing Period”, p. 77 relates that in 1628 Manjusiri had married a daughter of Yoto (died 1638), who was a grandson of Nurhaci. The girl was later adopted by the emperor as his daughter.

stomach upset.<sup>8</sup> Two [of your] grandchildren<sup>9</sup> have [already] died.’ and acted contrary to the imperial order and what he handed in as a memorial was greatly disrespectful.”

The Qorčīn refusal is not immediately understandable. In 1659, it was more than thirty years ago that representatives of this polity had allied with the ancestors of the Qing imperial house.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Qorčīn Mongols were among the Mongolian noblemen, who in 1636 formally acknowledged Hong Taiji (reigned 1627–1643) as the first emperor of the Qing dynasty. Lifanyuan officials were outraged by the way how the Qorčīn princes answered to the imperial correspondence. In the case of the Joriktu Cin Wang, they found fault with the fact that he had not asked for imperial permission to postpone his visit, but had simply declined the invitation. The Darhan Baturu Giyūn Wang was accused of evasiveness, because he had offered a variety of different excuses. Moreover, even though the emperor had stressed their close family relations, the Darhan Baturu Giyūn Wang may have been too explicit about his and his wife’s health condition.

When looking for traces of Mongol opposition to Manchu rule what naturally comes to mind are instances of armed resistance. For the seventeenth century, the Čaqar may be the most prominent example of Mongols, who renounced their bond with the imperial house and in 1675 launched an attack on Mukden.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the Sönid Mongols under their leader Tenggis may be seen as another example of Mongolian opposition. Tenggis had shown respect to the emperor in 1637 and in 1641 had been granted the title of a Jun Wang. However, in 1646 he renounced his loyalty to the emperor, openly rebelled against the dynasty and joined the Sečen Qan of the Qalqa.<sup>12</sup> As in the case of the Čaqar, his maneuvering was answered by a military campaign.

The passage under discussion can be understood as an expression of *non-violent* resistance against Manchu rule. As the example of the two Qorčīn princes relates, members of the Mongol nobility also expressed their discontent by rejecting patronizing attitudes of the court and not complying with rules of behaviour. In retrospect, there can be no doubt that the secure status of the Mongolian nobility under Qing rule went hand in hand with a loss of political autonomy.<sup>13</sup> The influence of Mongols and Mongolian matters at the court dwindled and, likewise, the competences of Mongolian regents and their sphere of responsibility within their own polity was more and more curtailed. Some members of the Southern Mongolian nobility were aware of their growing marginalization and did not hesitate to express their unease. Even more than two decades after their formal integration into

<sup>8</sup> The expression *hefeli aššambi* is documented in *Xin Manhan da cidian*, p. 395.

<sup>9</sup> For the omission of the plural suffix (Doerfer, *Der Numerus im Mandschu*, pp. 38–41).

<sup>10</sup> Weiers, “Der Mandschu-Khortsin Bund von 1626”, p. 415.

<sup>11</sup> Fang, “Hsiao-tuan Wen Huang-hou”, pp. 304–305.

<sup>12</sup> Kennedy, “Minggadari”, p. 576.

<sup>13</sup> For the changing status of the Southern Mongolian nobility: Di Cosmo, “A Historical Analysis of Manchu-Mongol Relations”, p. 181.

the Qing Empire, they found room to maneuver and used the diplomatic arena in order to assert their own political position.

The two Qorčīn noblemen had been close confidants of the father of the Shunzhi emperor (1644–1661) and are mentioned in the Huang Qing Kaiguo fanglüe among the Mongolian noblemen, who feasted with Hong Taiji shortly before his death in September 1643 after a victory over Ming China.<sup>14</sup> Both Qorčīn leaders were married to imperial princesses.<sup>15</sup> Together with their wives they had been guests at the court in August 1654 and had attended an imperial banquet.<sup>16</sup> There can be no doubt that the two princes did not just want to postpone their visit at the court, but were taking a political stance by declining the imperial invitation in a rather provocative manner. The impression that the Qorčīn princes did not want to alienate the court but adopted this policy in order to negotiate for more privileges cannot be totally dismissed. Affronting the emperor by disrespectful behaviour may have been a strategy pursued to gain more recognition and imperial attention. In retrospect, this seems to be convincing in the case of the Darhan Baturu Giyūn Wang who in July 1659 was elevated from Giyūn Wang (prince of the second degree) to Cin Wang (prince of the first degree).<sup>17</sup> However, when looking at the immediate response of the Lifanyuan officials, the Qorčīn princes' letters seem to have caused adverse reactions. When drafting a proposal for the emperor of how to deal with the two noblemen, the Lifanyuan insisted that the two princes should be punished for their disrespectfulness and should be brought to the capital and blamed there. The emperor rejected this proposal and ordered the Lifanyuan to discuss the matter again. The imperial answer to the memorial of the Lifanyuan goes as follows:<sup>18</sup>

“When I said ‘come’ and ‘let us reconcile with the Joriktu Wang and the Baturu Wang like close relatives’ they didn’t listen to my order and did not come. Obviously, this comes up to a breaking of law and their prevaricating and excuses were greatly disrespectful. Your ministry should get together with the officials of the three banners,<sup>19</sup> discuss the matter and make a memorial! Drop [the idea] of bringing the princes here!”

<sup>14</sup> Hauer, Huang-Ts'ing K'ai-kuo Fang-lüeh. Die Gründung des Mandschurischen Kaiserreiches, p. 573.

<sup>15</sup> This follows from the plural *gungju se* used earlier in the document.

<sup>16</sup> Qing chao qianqi Lifanyuan 2010, vol. 1, 71/72.

<sup>17</sup> Qing chao qianqi Lifanyuan 2010: vol. 1, no. 137, 222/223.

<sup>18</sup> Imperial rescript in Manchu language to the memorial of the Lifanyuan of Shunzhi 16/intercalary3/24 (May 14th, 1659) in Qing chao qianqi Lifanyuan (2010: vol. 1, 217): (1) joriktu wang baturu wang be niyamarama acaki (2) seme jio seci hese be donjihai uthai jiderakū (3) yasa de fafun akū adali bulcame siltahange (4) ambula giyan de acahakūbi : suweni jurgan . ilan (5) gūsai hebei ambasai emgi acafi gisurefi wesimbu : (6) wang sa be ubade gajira be naka : The rescript is also discussed in Heuschert-Laage, “From Personal Network to Institution Building”.

<sup>19</sup> Plain Yellow, Bordered Yellow and Plain White banner. Elliott, The Manchu Way. The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China, p. 404n147.

In his invitation, the emperor alluded to the family ties between the imperial house and the Qorčın nobility and used a terminology which emphasized affection and closeness. In the rescript, however, when addressing the Lifanyuan, he makes clear, that his invitation was an order (in Manchu: *hese*) and not to appear was against the law (in Manchu: *fajun aku*). It seems that for all parties concerned, the warm invitation to a family reunion could not conceal the obligatory character of his letter. This is an important point, because it is characteristic of the nature of the relationship, which was characterized by a parallel use of a vocabulary of affection and the emphasis on family ties and at the same time outright political pressure. The two Qorčın princes took up the familiar character of the invitation, but they not only refused to accept it, but also failed to answer the letters of the emperor with adequate courtesy and affection. This was a clear breach of the principles relevant in a patronage relationship which was both personal and political. According to the rules of patronage, verbal formula emphasizing mutual affection, gratitude and respect were essential for maintaining the bond between the two sides.<sup>20</sup> The absence of this vocabulary indicated discontent. It was a clear signal and, accordingly, at the court it was interpreted as hostile behaviour.

In the context of European medieval history, Gerd Althoff stressed that acts of government were performed in public in order to make visible the ruler's claim to authority and influence.<sup>21</sup> By taking part in ceremonies at court, participants showed their willingness to accept the sovereign's superiority. It was a symbolic act of commitment aimed at uniting the group into a whole and defining the status of individuals in relation to others. The special importance the first Qing emperor in his communication with the Mongolian nobility placed on formal expressions of respect and a correct terminology suggests that in the early Qing period symbols, signs and rituals were not only means to demonstrate differences in status, but had constitutive functions and were a way to establish hierarchies. Defining codes of behaviour was a way of creating and maintaining social and political relations and, by the details of ceremony, every participant was granted a certain position within the structures of the polity.<sup>22</sup> As Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger has shown, symbolic communication was especially meaningful when state structures were weak with only limited potential to enforce decisions and a strong orientation to reach consensus among political actors.<sup>23</sup> In this context, the imperial rescript, according to which the Shunzhi emperor rejected the proposal of the Lifanyuan to bring the princes to Beijing by force, is significant. As the case of the renegade leader Tenggis shows, use of force was an option, but for the Qing it was not the only possible way of disciplining unruly behaviour on part of the Mongolian nobility. For the two Qorčın princes, to be removed to Beijing against their will would have

<sup>20</sup> Emich, Reinhardt, von Thiessen, Wieland, "Stand und Perspektiven der Patronageforschung".

<sup>21</sup> Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale*.

<sup>22</sup> Heuschert-Laage, "Defining a Hierarchy: Formal Requirements for Manchu-Mongolian Correspondence Issued in 1636".

<sup>23</sup> Stollberg-Rilinger, "Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne", pp. 517/518.

been an outright humiliation. Such a step would inevitably lead to a change in the nature of the Manchu-Mongolian relationship, which so far maintained the appearance of a voluntary agreement. Injuring the dignity of leading members of the Mongolian nobility who had been on close terms with the Qing ruling house since decades would also have been a signal to other Mongolian leaders.

Among the Mongol confederations, which had joined the Manchu project by 1659, the Qorčın can be said to have been the most influential one. Qorčın Mongols were particularly well represented in Manchu-Mongolian intermarriages.<sup>24</sup> In the legal field, a number of regulations drafted for the Mongolian nobility in the seventeenth century include exemption clauses for members of Qorčın nobility. For example, the Mongolian Code drafted in the Kangxi period stipulates that the Tüsiyetü Čin Vang and the Joriytu Čin Vang of the Qorčın were the only Mongolian authorities who were allowed to retain part of the fine they had imposed on nobles under their command. (The remaining part of the payment had to be shared among the noblemen of their jurisdiction). In the case of all other Mongolian banner rulers, who had imposed fines on noblemen under their command, the part of the fine “due to the government” (*jasay-tur*) was collected by the central government.<sup>25</sup>

However, the number of rules including special allowances for the Qorčın nobility is small compared to the amount of rules, which more or less equally pertained to all Mongolian noble houses regardless of their standing prior to their affiliation with the Qing. For this reason, I believe, even though we do not know the concrete reason for the Qorčın rejection of the imperial invitation, it very likely was a reaction to attempts of the court to establish a standardized procedure for the Mongolian elite who had accepted Qing overlordship – a group which as such had not existed until recently. For the Qorčın nobility, to come the court not only redefined their position vis-à-vis the emperor, but also placed them on a par with other members of the Mongolian nobility, who likewise were granted imperial audiences on a regular basis. Qorčın princes as the most influential among the Qing Mongol nobility may have thought it beneath their dignity to be summoned to Beijing and to be treated according to a system of rules, which was more or less equally applied to all members of the Mongolian nobility. The personal character of the invitation and the fact that it apparently was brought forward incidentally, could not obscure the fact that in Manchu Mongolian relations there had been a trend towards formalization and standardization.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jagchid, “Mongolian-Manchu Intermarriage in the Ch’ing Period”, pp. 85–87.

<sup>25</sup> Regulation dates from the second half of the 1670s. Heuschert, *Die Gesetzgebung*, pp. 151/152.

<sup>26</sup> Heuschert-Laage, “From Personal Network to Institution Building”.

### 3 Archival Material as a Counterbalance to Court Publications

As a conclusion, I will raise some questions on the potential value of archival material vis-à-vis narratives and administrative codes which – in lack of other information – are often referred to as sources to reconstruct Mongolian history during the Qing period. The tendentiousness of military histories, which were compiled and circulated in order to celebrate the glorious victories of the dynasty, has been emphasized on various sides.<sup>27</sup> According to B. Oyunbilig and Michael Weiers, in eighteenth century historical narratives, events of the seventeenth century were frequently embedded in the political framework of the eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Narratives of Mongolian noblemen's visits to the court in the early seventeenth century present a similar picture: According to the Huang Qing Kaiguo Fanglüe (1786), as early as August 1643, the court had specified fines to be paid by members of the nobility who did not appear at a court meeting. This regulation explicitly did not refer to meetings in the context of military campaigns, but to regular meetings in the capital or meetings convened by the emperor.<sup>29</sup> As discussed above, however, in the case of the Qorčīn, the emperor rather tried to avoid the impression that Mongolian noblemen had to appear at the court as a form of punishment. For him, it was important to reach a broad consensus among the Mongolian nobility and to maintain the appearance that their support of the Manchu project was on a voluntary basis. The provocative answer of two Qorčīn noblemen to an imperial invitation likewise did not fit into the picture of the Qing emperor of an omnipotent sovereign who graciously bestowed favors on his Mongolian followers and was therefore omitted in later historical accounts.

Legal and administrative codes as collections of imperial decrees are sources of a different type and as a mirror of the political constellations at the time they are much more reliable than literary chronicles of war. However, when reading the Lifanyuan Zeli (Regulations of the Lifanyuan) or the Huidian (Collected Statutes) in order to reconstruct the history of the relations between Mongolian rulers and the Qing court,<sup>30</sup> one cannot presume that these sources are completely without bias. The regulations sometimes rather reflect the ambitious concepts of Lifanyuan officials, who had drafted regulations, which (after meeting with imperial approval) were incorporated into collections of imperial directives.

According to the Administrative Codes, in 1659 the times were long past when it was at the Qorčīn nobility's discretion to accept or not accept an imperial invita-

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<sup>27</sup> This was part of the Qianlong emperor's effort to immortalize his triumphs, a goal that was also achieved by the exhibition of commemorative inscriptions and the production of maps and pictures of battles. Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong*, pp. 100–106.

<sup>28</sup> Oyunbilig, *Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des Berichts*; Weiers, "Der erste Schriftwechsel zwischen Khalkha und Mandschuren". For the re-interpretation of gift-exchange Heuschert-Laage, "From Personal Network to Institution Building".

<sup>29</sup> Hauer, *Huang-Ts'ing K'ai-kuo Fang-lüeh*. Die Gründung des Mandschurischen Kaiserreiches, p. 572.

<sup>30</sup> For example in Chia, *The Lifanyuan and the Inner Asian Rituals*, pp. 64–66.

tion. The Internal Copy of the Lifanyuan Zeli<sup>31</sup> relates that in 1648 Mongolian nobles were supposed to appear at the court for the New Year's celebration regularly, and since 1649 the Mongolian nobility who had joined the Qing project was supposed to take turns when coming to the capital to ease the burden for the Lifanyuan to host them.<sup>32</sup> The Administrative Codes as well as the literary chronicle depict the journeys of Mongolian nobles to the court as inevitable events, which were performed as a matter of routine and were not subject to debate. However, the blunt refusal of the Qorčın princes to accept the invitation makes clear that in the mid-seventeenth century ceremonies of reverence held at the Qing court were still a matter of controversy. Different viewpoints did not necessarily lead to armed resistance but could be negotiated behind the façade of formulas of affection, gratitude and respect.

The letters of the Qorčın nobles who rejected an imperial invitation to come to the court show that Mongols did exercise agency: They competed for influence and status and – even years after their formal “incorporation” – not necessarily confined themselves to the role of the loyal supporters of the Qing imperial house. This aspect is all too easily overlooked. While there is a lot of information on the rules concerning the frequency of visits of Mongolian nobles at the court, the composition of the delegations or the number and value of presents, the question of whether or not the Mongolian side actually *accepted* an invitation does not come up. Court publications tend to present arrangements for visits of Mongols at the court as an accomplished fact and omit information about the role of Mongols as actors. Archival material can help us to reconstruct the processes of debate, which preceded the establishment of court rituals which are often seen as salient features of Manchu-Mongolian relations during the Qing period. It reminds us that Manchu policies were also met with opposition and regulations were not always accepted as readily as might appear from the perusal of official publications.

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<sup>31</sup> According to Zhao Yuntian, this work was completed in 1756 (Qianlongchao Neifuchaoben, p. 3). As Dalizhabu emphasizes, it should not be regarded as an early version of the Administrative Statutes of the Lifanyuan, but was rather a draft for the Collected Statutes, which included a section on the Lifanyuan. (Dalizhabu, “You guan Qianlong chao nei fu chaoben”).

<sup>32</sup> Qianlongchao Neifuchaoben, pp. 66/67. The Collected Statutes of the Kangxi period date this order to the eighth year Shunzhi (1651), see Heuschert, *Die Gesetzgebung*, p. 114.



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